



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 8**

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**AUG 25 2010**

Ref: EPR-N

Mr. Jeff Rawson, Associate State Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
440 West 200 South, Suite 500  
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

Re: Final Environmental Impact Statement for  
the West Tavaputs Natural Gas Full Field  
Development Plan, Utah CEQ #20100273

  
Dear ~~Mr.~~ Rawson:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)(C), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) prepared for the West Tavaputs Plateau Natural Gas Full Field Development Plan.

Under BLM's Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS, Bill Barrett Corporation and other operators would develop up to 807 natural gas wells and associated facilities from 494 well pads over a nine year period. Anticipated short term disturbance from the project is approximately 3,339 acres. The project area extends approximately 138,000 acres in eastern Utah and includes Nine Mile Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA), and Jack Canyon WSA. With the ROD, however, BLM has approved a contracted plan of development of approximately 626 natural gas wells from 120 well pads over a four to seven year period. With the substantial reduction in the number of well pads in the ROD, the estimated short term disturbance is 1,603 acres. In addition, BLM has committed in the ROD to require, monitor and enforce important mitigation measures for air quality, dust and cultural resources.

EPA's review of the Final EIS and ROD focused primarily on air quality, the key issue raised in our comments on the Draft EIS. In addition, we have included comments related to water resources, dust and cultural resources.

## Air Quality

In our May 23, 2008, comment letter, EPA rated the February 2008 Draft EIS as “Inadequate Information (3)” because of a lack of adequate information from air quality modeling to disclose the predicted impacts of the proposed project to ambient ozone concentrations. Over the past two years, EPA has worked closely with the BLM to resolve our concerns. At EPA’s request, the BLM completed a revised air quality modeling effort for the West Tavaputs project. The air quality modeling predicted ozone concentrations in exceedance of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) both within and outside of the West Tavaputs project area. The air quality modeling also indicated that the proposed development, under BLM’s Preferred Alternative E, is expected to result in an incremental increase in cumulative ozone concentrations of 0.3 ppb (Final EIS, Table 5.3-23, page 5-27). To address this incremental increase, EPA has worked with the BLM to develop appropriate mitigation. In addition, Bill Barrett Corporation, the primary operator, proposed a contracted development plan that incorporates several important development features and additional mitigation measures. With these additional mitigation measures and contracted development plan, nitrogen oxide emissions and volatile organic compound emissions are reduced by 83 percent and 69 percent, respectively, below the emissions calculated for BLM’s Preferred Alternative E (ROD, page 40). BLM has integrated the mitigation measures and contracted plan of development into the decision implemented with the ROD.

The Final EIS and ROD also include important measures that provide for an annual project emission inventory, and as appropriate, additional air quality analysis and mitigation. These measures serve as an important “backstop” and provide BLM with the opportunity to adaptively manage the development should air quality conditions worsen. Additional air quality mitigation measures may be necessary in the future to ensure the area remains in compliance with the NAAQS and the project does not contribute to ozone exceedances. EPA commends BLM for commitment in the ROD to these essential mitigation measures.

To ensure implementation of the mitigation, BLM and the operators will develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a Mitigation Compliance and Monitoring Plan. The MOU will clearly outline the specific mitigation measures within the ROD that require compliance inspections and/or effectiveness reports (ROD, Attachment 8). While not specifically identified in the description of the MOU, EPA requests that the air quality mitigation measures be included in the developed MOU. West Tavaputs is one of several proposed and existing oil and gas fields in the Uinta Basin where high ambient ozone concentrations have been recently monitored.

Full implementation of the mitigation will be essential to protecting air quality and public health as the development proceeds. As noted in the Final EIS, EPA has proposed to lower the primary 8-hour ozone NAAQS to a level between 60 – 70 ppb and to establish a distinct cumulative, seasonal “secondary” standard. A decision for the new ozone NAAQS is anticipated in Fall 2010. In addition, measured ambient concentrations of ozone in the Uinta Basin have recently reached levels that have considerably raised EPA’s concern for protection of air quality in the area. During this past winter, numerous exceedances of the current 75 ppb 8-hour ozone



NAAQS were measured at two separate monitoring stations within the Uinta Basin. For the period of January – March 2010, 38 exceedances were measured at the Ouray monitor site located approximately two miles south of Ouray, Utah, and approximately 20 miles northeast of the West Tavaputs project area. The intensity of ozone measurements is also cause for concern. The ozone values measured at the Ouray monitor site included 8-hour averages over 120 ppb (4<sup>th</sup> maximum 117 ppb).

#### Water Resources

EPA has grown increasingly concerned about the potential impacts to surface water and groundwater quality from oil and gas development. Over the past year, we have worked closely with the BLM Utah State Office to address concerns related to groundwater protection. For the West Tavaputs project, BLM has developed a long-term monitoring plan for water resources to address public comments on the Draft EIS. The goal of the plan is to monitor changes in water quality and quantity in the surface water, groundwater, and springs in the project area. EPA commends development of this plan and we hope to continue working with BLM Utah as the more specific details of the long-term monitoring plan for water resources are further defined.

#### Dust and Cultural Resources

Finally, EPA also wishes to acknowledge the development of the January 2010 Programmatic Agreement to mitigate impacts to critical cultural resources in Nine Mile Canyon and the project area. The Programmatic Agreement includes requirements for a cultural inventory, monitoring, and dust suppression plan for Nine Mile Canyon. With the Programmatic Agreement, it is hoped the adverse effects on historic properties will be avoided, minimized and/or mitigated.

EPA values the collaboration and working relationship we have built over the past two years since release of the Draft EIS. In this capacity, we hope to continue working with BLM as this project proceeds to ensure protection of air quality, water quality, and other critical environmental resources. If you have any questions regarding our comments on the Final EIS and ROD, please contact Joyel Dhieux of my staff at 303-312-6647.

Sincerely,



Carol C. Campbell  
Assistant Regional Administrator  
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation

cc: Jerry Kenczka, BLM Price Field Office  
Bill Stringer, BLM Vernal Field Office  
Robert Hargrove, EPA Washington D.C.